

The Vermont congressional delegation and Gov. Peter Shumlin today hailed President Obama's endorsement of legislation allowing states to provide better health care at a lower cost starting in 2014.

At a meeting of the National Governors Association Monday morning, Obama announced his support for amending the Affordable Care Act to allow states like Vermont to seek a federal waiver to the new law three years earlier than currently allowed. States would be required to design plans that are at least as comprehensive and affordable as the federal model and cover at least as many people.

Last month Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) introduced in the Senate and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) introduced in the House legislation that would advance the date waivers would be accepted from 2017 to 2014. The three joined Gov. Shumlin at a Montpelier press conference to announce the legislation, which would provide Vermont the flexibility it needs to adopt reforms Shumlin is pursuing.

Leahy said, "This is a wise decision that keeps in focus the goal of continually improving health care in America. I applaud President Obama and Secretary Sebelius for supporting efforts by Vermont and other states to go above and beyond what the Affordable Care Act requires. They know that the federal government does not have a monopoly on good ideas, and innovations by the states will prove – and improve --- the benefits of health insurance reform, on the ground, and in practice. While some in Washington want to turn the clock back and repeal the new health reform law, Vermont and other states want to move ahead. Vermont has already been working hard to improve the state's system of health care, and passage of the delegation's waiver bill will move our state one step closer to that goal."

Sanders said, "At a time when 50 million Americans lack health insurance and when the cost of health care continues to soar, it is my strong hope that Vermont will lead the nation in a new direction through a Medicare-for-all, single-payer approach. I am delighted that President Obama announced today that he will, in fact, support allowing states to innovate with health coverage models sooner rather than later. I worked hard to draft and secure the waiver provision in the health reform law and I am very pleased the president now agrees that we should make it available in 2014 as originally intended. While there is a lot of work to be done, I look forward to working with Sens. Leahy, Wyden, Inouye, Brown and others in the Senate and Rep. Welch and others in the House to get this done as soon as possible."

Welch said, "President Obama's support for allowing states to innovate sooner is a good news for Vermont and all states looking to tailor health care reform to individual states' circumstances. This legislation will give Vermont a green light to lead the nation in providing quality health care at a lower cost. I'm hopeful that Democrats and Republicans alike will support this practical step to give states flexibility to achieve progress their own way."

Shumlin said, "I was excited to learn about this today during a visit to the White House. All along officials from Health and Human Services have expressed a willingness to work with us, as long as we don't compromise standards under the law. I think this is an excellent example of how we can work together to control skyrocketing health care costs and implement meaningful health care reform as soon as possible."

A fact sheet on the delegation's "State Leadership in Healthcare Act" is available [here](#) .